SONGS OF THE WEBUTUCK

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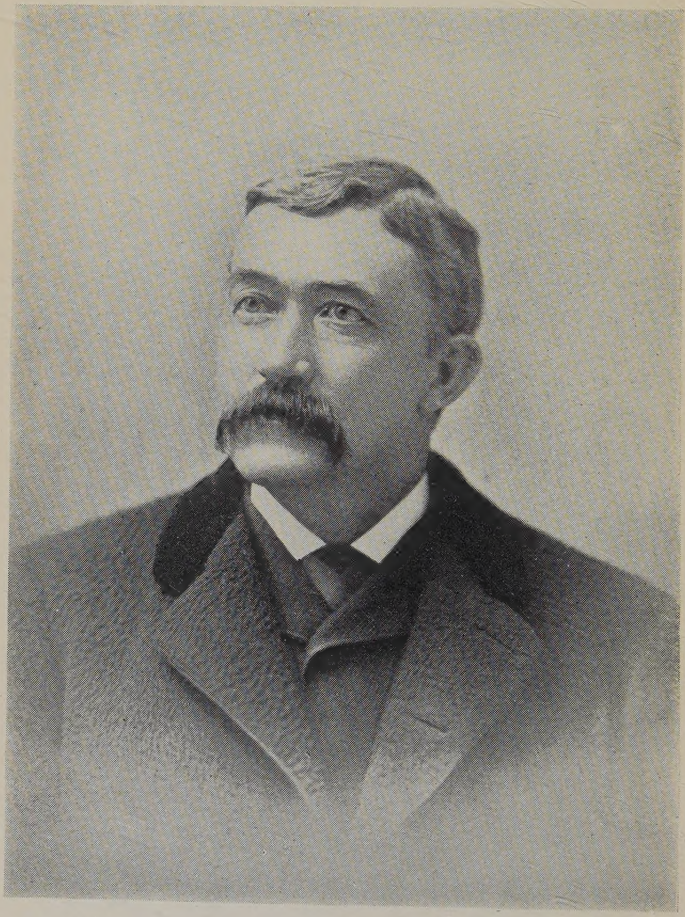

Myron B. Benton

SONGS

OF THE

WEBUTUCK

BY

MYRON B. BENTON

POUGHKEEPSIE, N. Y.
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THE POET OF THE WEBUTUCK.

1834 1902

The author of the poems in this little collection spent his whole life at the homestead where he was born, and where his father and grandfather had lived before him, in the eastern part of the Town of Amenia, New York, adjoining the Town of Sharon, Connecticut.

In this ancestral home, which he christened "Troutbeck," because of the half-tame trout which frequented the large spring at the back of the house, the very landscape seems not only to have become "a part of him," as Whitman phrases it, but to have responded to his presence and influence. It is hardly a straining of metaphor to say that the Webutuck—musical Indian name!—which flowed past the roof-tree, flowed also into the poet's heart; and that the varied aspects of the beautiful valley were not so much mirrored in

his life as they were absorbed therein and become part of it, to be transmuted into expressions of beauty and of thought. He wrote, not as one who observed from one side, but rather as one who was himself a part of the poem. His were the fields which pulsed "with seas of amber wheat;" he was one of "the sunburnt mowers . . . in the swath," and he it was who could "tell of the hidden bower where the orchis grows."

A farmer, born of a line of farmers, a lover of Nature in all her varied moods, devotedly attached to the scenes and surroundings of his nativity, he was also a lover of good literature, and of good men and women, and made Troutbeck a centre of interest to certain appreciative ones, who, like himself, were followers of the intellectual and spiritual life.

The death of his wife, in December, 1896, was a severe blow, and it was then that his grief found expression in "Sad Christmastide." From that time his strength failed steadily, as the years passed, and in the marvelously beautiful autumn of 1902 he sat day after day by the great south window of his library, feast-

ing his eyes on the ideal landscape before him. Of this time, when he felt his end to be approaching, his poem entitled "A Mood," published many years before in The Dial, reads like a prophecy. It was during these last days of weakness that he requested his lines beginning, "There is one spot for which my soul will yearn," might be read at his funeral; a request which was complied with.

As he lived, so he died; an affectionate husband and brother, a staunch friend, a trusted neighbor, an esteemed citizen, and a rare and sweet personality to those of his intimate acquaintance. With the calmness of a philosopher, and an instinctive faith in The Infinite, he passed away.

In his fine talent for landscape gardening our poet of the Webutuck did not, as is too often the case with specialists, confine his appreciation to the limits of an enclosure. In his later years some of the best things he published were written in an effort to promote in the community a better understanding and appreciation of the natural beauties of the locality, and of the

artistic side of farm life. Indeed nothing could be more fitting than that he should be known as the "Poet of The Webutuck," for no other heart was so finely attuned to its melodies, and no one else has so perfectly caught and interpreted them.

The poems here gathered, many of which now see print for the first time, are selected mainly because they—more than others of equal intrinsic merit—bespeak his tribute to the Webutuck and its valley, and "that sheltered valley farm" which he so loved. To those who have looked upon the scene they need no other introduction, and to those who have not, the author's further introduction must be the poems themselves.

C. E. B.

MY RIVER.

O well I know what thou wast seeking long,
Blithe Webutuck, in all thy devious sallies,
Past groves and meadows echoing with song;
'Twas just this nook! Of all thy flowery valley's
Countless green coves, no sweeter one, I ween,
Thy waters find in all their path serene,
From the cool springs that bubble in Taghkanic,
To where they join the troublous Housatonic.

And now thou'st found this shadowy repose,
Thy bubbles pause a moment here, and close
The drift leaves creep up to the grassy marge,
And the swift wavelets fade in circles large.
And here am I, my bonny little river,
Close by thee now! O well thou knewest whither
Would turn, ere long, my pathway serpentine,
As devious as thine own in Hogarth's Line!

There is a concourse here of pleasant sights
For thee and me, my merry-hearted fellow;
Glimpses, dear Stream, of hemlock crownéd heights,
And stolen peeps at orchards waxing mellow;

White hillsides beckoning to the harvesters;
And pastures flecked with fleecy wanderers.
And even here three curious whispering rows
From a wide maize-field, serried rank on rank,

Shaking the gold dust of their nodding blows
On silken fringe, peep down the grassy bank.
But underneath this shade is deep seclusion,
Safe-nestled from the noisy world's intrusion;
And round about the tree-tops clasp in love,
And hold deep converse with all winds that rove;
While clouds pause, one by one, and envious look
Into the restfulness of our green nook.

In such a spot did Shelley love to sever
All bonds of that tumultuous world, whose might
Too rudely jostled him, and ruffled ever
The faery wings whereon his soul took flight.
Here would he hour on hour have lain, soft hushed,
And set unnumbered paper boats to grope,
As was his wont, where'er a wavelet rushed
With busy kisses round a dimpled slope;

And spun that lunar rainbow gossamer
Which held my boyhood's fancy in its clear
Bright meshes woven through the tender brain,
That us, through sweet intoxicating pain,
To mystic realms by light unearthly led.
O Webutuck! from thee what coolness pressed,
What azure calm upon my throbbing head,
Filled with those fevered longings, thirst, unrest.

Perchance, the clear rose-petal film that wrapt
The tender soul about in young life's ways
Turned soon to mail; threads of enchantment snapt,
And visions vanished like a morning's haze.
There are regrets for tinge of those warm days,
And pensive looks cast backwards to that path.
But hours with thee have brought the sweeter grace,
And the deep sky a bluer glory hath.
Midsummer months the richer harvests hold.
O Stream! the years as gently, silently,
Drop in my heart as yon first leaf of gold
Adown its spiral path wings unto thee.

EARLY AUTUMN BESIDE THE WEBUTUCK.

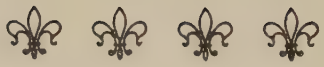
A single water-lily midway blows;
And forth from its adytum, deep enrolled,
Through clasp of golden doorways manifold,
Even to the shore a hint of fragrance flows.
And here, along the ledge, a lone path toils
O'er lichened rocks and under grape-vine coils
Toward breezy hills; and there outstretches wide
An aged ash its lean arms o'er the tide;
But climbs and winds the woodbine's scarlet thread,
Till all its haggard form is garlanded.

A petted isle the fondling waters twine—
A tiny isle with hemlocks green and vine
Embowered, that hide within a mimic wood
A little grass-plot where no feet intrude,
Save when the fairies midnight revels keep,
And muskrats slip from watery solitude,

Or, shyest of the shy, the brown minks peep,
When fairies, even, have danced themselves
asleep.

Upon a tall dead trunk unceasingly
A bright woodpecker beats his swift *tattoo,*
And timid flowerets nestle in the shrubbery;
But the prized gem mine isle doth hoard away,
I know, to kindle in my dazzled view,
Like altar-flame, some hallowed morn next May,
Is one gay pinkster-blumen's honeyed spray.
Sweeter the sweetness of mid-autumn's bloom
With dream of Mays long past and Mays to come.

The locomotive's clarion through these trees
Darts like the arrow from an Indian's bow;
But hills and leafy woods transmute its woe
To sweetest chords, and here it murmurs peace.
And thus, in this embowered security,
So far the bustling world's rude turmoils seem,
That their remembrance softly touches me
As the faint-echoing music of a dream.



MY ARGOSIES.

O boyhood still about me loving clings!
Dear, careless heart, what bliss thy presence
brings—
What dew of freshness clusters round about thee!
The lonely way how should I roam without thee?
Who would not be, sometimes, a careless child,
And things that boyhood's Saturdays beguiled
Rehearse again? An old-time sport, to-day,
I'll play, once more, in childish foolishness;
For strolls my Webutuck along his way
Beneath this very linden's cool recess.

Into his fond extending arms I launch
My Lilliputian ships. From linden's branch
Each leaf a curving hull is, from whose mast,—
A daisy stalk, by grassy shrouds held fast,—

Hang sails of filmy petals, light as air.
Help me, ye fairies, with your little fingers,
To speed my craft upon a voyage so fair,
Whilst yet the breeze reluctant stirs and lingers.

These clumsy hands can poise them not; and one
Of you—spry Puck or Ariel—yonder run
Where, in a spree, last Equinox, my creek
Tossed on the shore his gems in reckless glee,
And bring a few bright pebbles unto me
For ballast to my rocking barks, and pick
The brightest shards from out the gravel thick.

Now, one by one, glide forth my little ships,
Each weighed with treasure till she almost dips:
The Outward Bound, with grass-flag waving o'er;
Red Rover, with the cardinal-flower mast-high;
Asia, with thistle-down and brown leaves hoar;
With Young America in gay wreaths nigh,
(The stateliest craft of all the grand array;)
The Northern Lights; the azure Morning Star—

My hopeful fleet, full-rigged for voyages far,
To sail thro' storm and shine, thro' night and day.

Some tipsy bees for sailors with them ride,
Who ceaseless drink from out the honey-flasks—
What reckless crews such fragile craft to guide!
And high on mizzen-top a gay troop basks,
Of golden-girdled hornets, side by side.
What merchandise of inland treasure sails!
Sweet wood-flowers, heap on heap, in smothering bales;
With aromatic mint and curious burrs;
Moss, lichens, pebbles, shells of tiny snails;
And rare plant-seeds for ignorant foreigners.

Of shiftless passengers, what motley throng!
There many a coward to the strong mast hugs—
Gold beetles, caterpillars, lady-bugs,
Who tremulous o'er the taffrail peep along;
But braver dragonflies and butterflies
Are there; rough humble-bees, with dozing song,
And long-legged wasps a-dangling from the guys.

Sail forth, my little fleet, toward the sea—
Winding through all my creek's blue mystery!
Some yet may float to farthest meadows bright,
But some go down before they leave my sight.
Ye bear no costly freight of foreign store;
But still, perchance, to lonely dwellers by the shore
Ye shall waft fragrance, and your gladness bear
To many a cove, shut out from Heaven's bright air.

ORCHIS.

Who can tell of the hidden bower
Where the orchis grows?
Who can divine the secret hour
When the orchis blows?

Shadowy hemlocks; groined arches of oaks and chestnuts columnar;
Towers of rock and battlements, garlanded gaily, uprearing;
Waving from pinnacles lofty their banners of birch and of laurel;
Tinted lichens the dark walls pencilling softly with pictures;
Through this dim aisle echoes the merry warbling of waters—
Rhythmic youth that pulses in heart of the gray, wrinkled mountain.

Reckless, impulsive, and free! yet ever blindly obeying,
Passive, the stern law of force and the sweeter law given by beauty—
Tossing white curls as it combs the brown roots, grotesquely enwoven;
Shaking the maidenhair fronds, and anemones sprinkling;
Over fallen masts—Pythons half-buried in leaves of last summer—
Down the steep mountain ravine the brooklet, jubilant, leapeth;
Never repining at checks in its passage—no voice of complaining!
Every intruding impediment only awakens a music—
Songs that would die in its heart on a smoother pathway, and beauty
Lends that no tranquil rivulet finds in bee-haunted meadows.

O blithe band of white-robed waterfalls! hand-in-hand springing

Swiftly adown the precipitous height, like the angels resplendent,
Jacob, in vision of glory, beheld descending from heaven—
When the May winds, a-roving, seek dimmest, loneliest wood-glens,
Into your murmurous haunt a daring mortal intrudeth—
Parting the mazes of clematis, weaving hemlock and hazel.

Reverent tread his feet the carpet of ground-pine and mosses;
As the destined prince—a century's silence awaited—
Far in depth of the haunted forest entered the mystic
Circle of shade, and climbed the tower of the Sleeping Palace.
Glows his heart unsullied; his deep eye kindles with rapture;
Kiss his cheeks the cool moss-lips—he claspeth the fern's reaching fingers;

Lover, surprising thy virginal beauty—bewitching, coy Wildwood!

All her costliest gems the earth in jealousy hideth;
Never upon them unheeding, rude foosteps carelessly stumble;
Only these two clusters of shyest orchis, springing—
Here, alone, of all thy cool hollows, thou loveliest valley!
Hidden deftly as whippoorwill's nest in deepest brown covert—
Rarest, dream-odored, delicate flowers, sisterhood fairest—
Found by thy prescient search, as gold by the pale treasure-seeker!
Thou, fond lover of all that is kissed by the weather of heaven,
Well divinest the times that nature hideth from others!
Thou dost count the spring days' procession, by flower-births numbered;

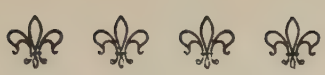
Watching the kindling hope and restless throbs
of the burgeons;
(Months of snowy tempest with frost-wand
touching and blessing
Each frail life that it passes unscathed the ordeal
of sunshine.)

Early thou seekest, close to the lagging snowdrift, that beechen
Slope which gives a flower first to the year's regal pageant—
Bringing to life its faint-odored love, the fragile paas-blumen.
Soon, O soon, the breezy May-time's blossom-storm threatens!
Who will handful first the gossamer-petaled wind-flowers?
Gather the snowy flakes of the blood-root ere they have melted!
Eager thou art to catch the chirp of the home-seeking robin;
And the bluebird's flutter, and supple swing of the swallow;

Longing, expectant, in March, for the thrill exultant at shouts of
Marshalled hosts in the clouds, of wild-geese straining their pinions,
Fierce with haste to plunge into Arctic waters of coolness.

Pilgrim to farthest green uplands! pathfinder in intricate forests!
Roving and strolling—pursuing fond shapes that call thee, and beckon
Vaguely on misty mountain summits, dissolving in glory,
Over thee bending from cloudland the radiant forms of immortals;
Thou dost listen in awe to wisdom of ages primeval—
Voices celestial speaking in depth of ways unfrequented;
And kneelest at long-lost altars, grass-crowned and weed-mantled.
Thronging, below, the masses worship, with shouts and rejoicings,

Golden idols of force and tradition; alone, thou waitest,
Silent, upon the Mount, and receivest the law from Heaven.



THE ORIOLE'S NEST.

Dwelling aloft in a summer realm,
Pendant in airy solitude,
High on the drooping bough of an elm,
Nestle the oriole's golden brood.

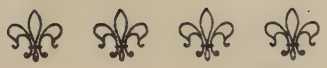
Between the branches, in azure glow,
The sky looks through where the white clouds gleam,
And the dotted landscape glimmers below,
Floating afar, like a pictured dream.

The sun reaches out his first gold rays
To weave them about the happy nest,
And the cradle is rocked by the soothing plays
Of soft winds out of the gentle west,

Awaking a musical murmuring,
As they float in the leafy arches along;
Whilst the mother-bird, on flashing wing,
Circles the nest with lullaby song.

Secure in your breezy citadel,
  Between the earth and the bending skies,
Nestled birdlings, do you not dwell
  Alone in a beautiful paradise?

I see your half-dozen heads in glee
  Peep shyly over the tufted rim,
And envy your airy security,
  So far from the world with labor grim.



THE OLD ELM TREE.

O Tree, whose loftiest branches rise,
  Lifting forever up to the stars,
Rooted on earth, and climbing the skies
    On nebulous golden bars!

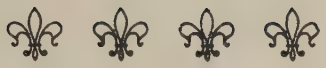
I seek thy shade, where I came as a boy
  To the happy realm beneath thy shoots,
Storing my pebbles with childish joy
    Amongst thy moss-netted roots.

The wave of thy boughs flitted cool and sweet
  Over the flush of my youthful face;
But deeper—deeper thy fair leaves greet
    Manhood with balm of grace.

O Tree, where the bird of strongest wing
  Reaches never to build her nest,
Let me within no covert swing
    Upon thy topmost crest;

But low in the drooping mid-boughs' shade,
Safe from the chilly clouds of even,
Be ever my shelter within thee made;
Nearer to earth than to heaven.

And, bird of the dawn, thou wilt hasten and bring
Delights that alone to thee belong—
Thou wilt weave o'er my rest, on tireless wing,
The branches, with fire and song!



MIDSUMMER INVITATION.

O pallid student! leave thy dim alcove,
And stretch one restful summer's afternoon,
Thoughtless amidst the thoughtless things of June,
Beneath these boughs with light and murmur wove.
Drop book and pen, a thrall releaséd rove—
The Sisyphean task flung off; impugn
The withered Sphinx, with earth's fresh heart atune:
Thou, man, the origin of evil prove!
O leave that dark coil where the spider delves,
To trap the unwary reasoner in his lair,
And weavé oblivion's veils round learnéd shelves;
List to the beat of Ariel's happy wings,
And cool thy brain in this balm-laden air;
Here brooding peace shall still thy questionings.

RUMINATION.

O, foolish Brooklet! You have strayed this morning
Into this shade without a courteous warning,
Out of that sleepy swamp, just o'er the hill,
To break your shallow gossip here at will;
Of sluggish life beneath the hardhack bushes,
Amongst the cat-tail flags and waving rushes;
Flirtations of the dragon-flies; the frogs'
Gruff lamentations under toppling bogs;
Of tipsy, reeling snipes, who cannot keep
Their balance midst the osier tangles deep;
Of turtles lifting up their muddy noses
Beneath the buckthorn bloom and gay swamp roses.
And this low life upon the weedy peat
Is all the world to you in young conceit,
My little brook, and nothing old or new
Is half so deep and worldly-wise as you.

And so this leaf-wove shade your prattling noise
Of gossip fills, and drowns the oriole's voice;
But moveth not that wise and ancient cow,
Who chews her juicy cud so languid now
Beneath her favorite elm, whose drooping bough
Lulls all but inward vision fast asleep;
But still her tireless tail, a pendulum-sweep,
Mysterious clock-work guides, and some hid pulley
Her drowsy cud each moment raises duly.

Of this great wondrous world has she seen more
Than you, my little brook, and cropped its store
Of succulent grass on many a mead and lawn,
And strayed to distant uplands in the dawn.
And she has had some dark experience
Of graceless man's ingratitude; and hence
Her ways have not been ways of pleasantness,
Nor all her paths of peace. But her distress
And grief she has lived past; your giddy round
Disturbs her not, for she is learned profound
In deep Brahminical philosophy.
She chews the cud of sweetest revery,
Above your worldly prattle, brooklet merry,
Oblivious of all things sublunary.

THE MOWERS.

The sunburnt mowers are in the swath—
Swing, swing, swing!
The towering lilies loath
Tremble and totter and fall;
The meadow-rue
Dashes its tassels of golden dew;
And the keen blade sweeps o'er all—
Swing, swing, swing!

The flowers, the berries, the feathered grass,
Are thrown in a smothered mass;
Hastens away the butterfly;
With half their burden the brown bees hie;
And the meadow-lark shrieks distrest,
And leaves the poor younglings all in the nest.
The daisies clasp and fall;
And totters the Jacob's-ladder tall.
Weaving and winding and curving lithe,

O'er plumy hillocks—through dewy hollows,
His subtle scythe
The nodding mower follows—
Swing, swing, swing!

Anon, the chiming whetstones ring—
Ting-a-ling! ting-a-ling!
And the mower now
Pauses and wipes his beaded brow.
A moment he scans the fleckless sky;
A moment, the fish-hawk soaring high;
And watches the swallows dip and dive
Anear and far.
They whisk and glimmer, and chatter and strive;
What do they gossip together?
Cunning fellows they are,
Wise prophets to him!
"Higher or lower they circle and skim—
Fair or foul to-morrow's hay weather!"
Tallest primroses, or loftiest daisies,
Not a steel-blue feather
Of slim wing grazes:
"Fear not! fear not!" cry the swallows.

Each mower tightens his snath-ring's wedge,
And his finger daintily follows
The long blade's tickle-edge;
Softly the whetstone's last touches ring—
Ting-a-ling! ting-a-ling!
Like a leaf-muffled bird in the woodland nigh,
Faintly the fading echoes reply—
Ting-a-ling! ting-a-ling!

"Perchance the swallows that flit in their glee,
Of to-morrow's hay-weather know little as we!"
Says Farmer Russet. "Be it hidden in shower
Or sunshine, to-morrow we do not own—
To-day is ours alone!—
Not a twinkle we'll waste of the golden hour.
Grasp tightly the nebs—give heel and give toe!—
Lay a goodly swath, shaved smooth and low!
Prime is the day—
Swing, swing, swing!"

Farmer Russet is aged and gray—
Gray as the frost, but fresh as the spring.
Straight is he
As the green fir-tree;

And with heart most blithe, and sinews lithe,
He leads the row with his merry scythe.
"Come, boys! strike up the old song
While we circle around—
The song we always in haytime sing—
And let the woods ring,
And the echoes prolong
The merry sound!"

SONG.

July is just in the nick of time!
(Hay-weather, hay-weather;)
The midsummer month is the golden prime
For haycocks smelling of clover and thyme:—
(Swing all together!)
July is just in the nick of time!

Chorus.

O, we'll make our hay while the good sun shines—
We'll waste not a golden minute!
No shadow of storm the blue arch lines;
We'll waste not a minute—not a minute!
For the west wind is fair;
O, the hay-day is rare!—
The sky is without a brown cloud in it!

June is too early for richest hay;
(Fair weather, fair weather;)
The corn stretches taller the livelong day;
But grass is ever too sappy to lay;—
(Clip all together!)
June is too early for richest hay.

August's a month that too far goes by;
(Late weather, late weather;)
Grasshoppers are chipper and kick too high!
And grass that's standing is fodder scorched dry;—
(Pull all together!)
August's a month that too far goes by.

July is just in the nick of time!
(Best weather, best weather;)
The midsummer month is the golden prime
For haycocks smelling of clover and thyme;—
(Strike all together!)
July is just in the nick of time!

Still hiss the scythes!
Shudder the grasses' defenceless blades—

The lily-throng writhes;
And, as a phalanx of wild-geese streams,
Where the shore of April's cloudland gleams,
On their dizzy way, in serried grades—
Wing on wing, wing on wing—
The mowers, each a step in advance
Of his fellow, time their stroke with a glance
Of swerveless force;
And far through the meadow leads their course—
Swing, swing, swing!

HAYING.

'Tis haying now; up through the narrow lane,
Brushing soft cheeks against drooping willows,
Come the great loads of hay in rolling billows.
Half hid, beneath, the panting oxen strain,
But still the driver shouts, and happy boys
Ride on the swaying top with mirth and noise.
And here the great barn stands, with doors wide thrown
Apart as for a haytime festival,
This summer's day in that cool, breezy hall.
On either side, from seedy floors bestrown,
The aromatic mows pile high, and climb
The big girths, hanging many a lock of thyme
In the dim peak among the darting swallows.

I hear a stir in yonder meadow hollows—
The buzz and rattle of the horse-drawn mowers;
And see the pendulum-swinging line, where scythe

With scythe keeps stroke in hands of haymen lithe,
Slow circle round; and some are building stores
Of hay in towers upon the shaven knolls;
And some are busy in the scented rolls—
A lively band of strong-limbed ones! But I,
A farmer, this sunshiny hay-day lie
As idle as the listless bubbles grope
Dreaming along the shadow of this slope—
A grassy slope, whose lowest fringe is wet
In eddying ripples of the rivulet.

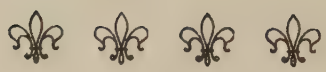
All through the golden hours of yesterday
I shook the fragrance from the curing hay;
To-day, beneath these boughs of dripping balm,
In idle peace I breath restoring calm.
Here is deep peace, tranquility; why fret
The live-long year around without regret
For holidays and interspersed vacations?
From ceaseless slavery's bond at last the dust
Of toil gnaws at the heart with cankering rust,
And fade all fair and morn-lit aspirations.

A burdened crop the sinewy laborer brings—
The nodding wheat, the maize-blade rustlings;
  But harvest richer than the golden heap
Of grain I gather here with folded hand;
The choicest crop of all the fertile land
  These tireless busy-bodies never reap.

Nature—between her days of anxious worry,
Her pressing spring-time care and weeks of hurry,
When fruit must set or fail, and buried hills
Of corn-seed sprout or rot; ice-fettered rills
Be loosened, and the blighted pasture-field
A few green blades for hungry flocks must yield—
Hath many a holiday and Sabbath peace,
Still days when restlessness and forecast cease,
  And taking no thought for the morrow's weather,
Nor over-anxious for the autumn's guerdon,
The patient waiting bud its calix-burden
  Breaks not for whole long sunny days together.

Toil manfully betimes, but leave a free
Wide margin for serene tranquility.
Through purple noons, through long, ripe, sunny hours,
Leave potent Nature with her genial powers
To work her charm; her Eden innocence
Shall wrap thy soul about—her love dispense,
Sprinkling thy withered heart with freshening showers.

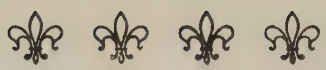
A robin, yonder, with her new-fledged brood
Is holding holiday in happiest mood,
As chipper and as full of frolicking
As of her family the latest hatched.
In yonder elm she built with tireless wing
Their nest; songless for many a week she watched
The callow brood; but now a short vacation
She holds on joyous wing, in wild elation.
To-morrow, she on silent flight will hie
To start with care her second brood; and I,
To-morrow, with rake and sharpened scythe,
Will seek the haying band, so busy there
Upon the meadow plain, of heart as blithe
As this gay cricket chirping in my hair.



EMBOWERED.

O Poet, to this woodbine-woven cope
Thy golden book I bring, but will not ope!
Lie there, midst grasses through thy dreamings
wove
With curious bugs thy subtile sense to prove.
(What odorous flowers those book-leaves press—
what sweets
Of folded dreams, O blossom-hearted Keats!)
When bleak winds rustle in the withered woods,
And ferret out the snuggest solitudes,
And when, on creaking limb, the frowsy owl
Flutters and shrugs to hear the raw wind howl,
O Poet, then thy song shall wake again
Midsummer raptures in my torpid brain:—
The flush of clouds, the flow of chanting rivers,
Patter of rainbow-sprinkled drops, life-givers,

Gay things from brown cocoons, the mid-air madness
Of reckless birds, the deep sky's yearning gladness,
With meadows full of bobolinks in tune—
All the delightfulness of Summer's noon!
To-day I cannot heed thy silvern chimes,
Nor turn to harken to thy richest rhymes;
For, on yon bough, whilst no rude wind is making
The tiniest leaflet tremble on the trees,
A little tawny bird is throbbing—shaking,
Ruffled by whirlwind of his ecstacies,
Poured forth in swiftest songs of joy. Ah, he
His happy heart can give in melody!
But I, so full of joy, can only sip
The ripe hour's glory in with silent lip.



CUCKOO SONG.

IMITATION OF AN OLD ENGLISH SONG

Summer is coming!
Sing gaily Cuckoo;
Bees are a-humming,
Water falls trumming,
O blithe Cuckoo!
Cheerily ring,
Merrily sing,
Cuckoo! Cuckoo!

Blossom the daisies,
Sing sweetly Cuckoo;
Lowing herd grazes,
Flocks in green places,
O blithe Cuckoo!
Cheerily ring,
Merrily sing,
Cuckoo! Cuckoo!

Morning is greeting,
Sing gladsome Cuckoo;
Snowy flocks bleating,
Merry lambs fleeting,
O blithe Cuckoo!
Cheerily ring,
Merrily sing,
Cuckoo! Cuckoo!

Whilst the cock croweth
Sing loudly Cuckoo;
Buried seed groweth,
Dewy mead bloweth,
O blithe Cuckoo!
Cheerily ring,
Merrily sing,
Cuckoo! Cuckoo!

THE HUMMING BIRD.

Thou hast strayed from Paradise!
Brighter skies
Than of earth
Beam above thy land of birth.
Thou dost hover
From thy far-off spirit-flight,
On swift wing of woven light.
Wouldst thou ever, truant rover,
Fold with us thine angel-wing?
Wouldst thou touch some earthly thing?

Here thou mayest joy pursue
Where the garden's bright wreaths twine,
And the flowers at pleasure woo.
On the honey-suckle vine

Amber clusters drink thy kisses—
Faint beneath thy wild caresses.
Lily-of-the-valley bells,
Deep in dew,
Shake their silvern chimes anew;
Columbine, with nectar-cells,
And the morning-glories blue,
Tremble in a blissful trance,
'Neath the fervor of thy glance.

Violets,
Hidden in their green retreat,
Thyme-leaves sweet,
Mignonettes,
And the myrtle's azure mass,
Low in beds of fragrant grass,
Hear with joy thy rushing wing;
For thou'rt ever whispering
Words of love
To the humblest floweret, even,
That there is a wide blue heaven
Up above.

Through the sunny garden coming,
Only this soft humming, humming,
Falls upon mine eager ear.
Where thy song? I list to hear
Sweeter note than seraphim
Chime with harp of cherubim.

Messenger of joy and light,
Wafting in ecstatic flight—
Thy sweet life is song, fair one,
Other note thou needest none.

Speed thee on thy mission holy!
Cheer the downcast, melancholy;
Whisper love unto the lowly,
Drooping flowers,
Hidden in neglected bowers;
Chase the shadows
From the meadows;

Carry sunshine to the darkened
Who have hearkened
To thy coming;
And this drowsy humming, humming,
Shall be sweeter song to hear
Than a seraph's, ringing clear.

A FANCY.

Humming-bird—
Glowing, flitting, never waiting,
In the sunshine palpitating,
Passion-stirred—

Thou'rt a sigh,
'Scaped a sunny maiden's breast;
Phantom of a sweet unrest
Flitting by.

Ah, the storm
Throbbing, heaving, ever there
Beat too rudely for thy fair,
Fragile form!

Fugitive—
Thou hast from thy prison broken;
When lips parted for the token
Lovers give—

Thou didst fly,
Glowing from the mingled blisses,
Wingéd by a pair of kisses—
Happy sigh!

THE WHIPPOORWILL'S SHOE FOUND BLOOMING IN A GARDEN.

Long garden beds in shining rows
The geometric walks enclose;
All day the toil-bent gardener hoes
These nursed and petted flowers, whose fattened beauty glows.

Subdued and tame, they never dare
To peep above the paling there;
What know they of the beauty rare
Of flowers that drink the primal sweets of forest air?

Who seeks to-day the wildwood's boon?
Who comes to till the bed or prune
In that green glade I found so soon
In eager boyhood, many a Saturday afternoon?

No gardener hoes their roots, nor stoops
To pull the weeds from crowded groups;
Frail, helpless things midst warring troops,
Beneath dark rocks, and choked in coils and viny loops!

Nor venomed sting, nor brambly snare
To guard their life with fretful care!
Amidst the fierce contention there
They only lift their tender eyes in helpless prayer.

And yet the spring-breath woos their life;
Their sweetness fears no thorny knife,
But reaps rich beauty from the strife
Of wrestling giant forms in shadowed woodland rife.

Art thou with this protected crew—
In this prim bed, my Whippoorwill's Shoe?
Pouring out here thy scent and hue,
Thou child of some far glen, balmy with noontime dew?

What flowers in their adyta mould
Such sweets as fill thy cup of gold?—
Incense no garden blossoms hold,
An odor strange and wild as dreamland dells enfold.

Thy golden goblet's burden ease—
Empty thy hidden essences!
Pour in my breath the winy seas—
Enchanted wine, no crimson vineyard presses squeeze.

One draught from off the magic rim!
No more I see the garden trim,
The flaunting shows, the flower-beds prim;
No more the gardener bent, with heat and labor grim.

Thronging, thronging the woods of May!
The stir of leafy rivalry;
The wings of birds, the birds' wild lay;
Again I live my boyhood's heedless holiday;

Roaming the landscape far and wide;
Up the scarred mountain's rocky side,
Where white clouds linger as they glide;
And down the moist cool gorge, where curious mosses hide.

O May-wind! that in wood-walk bustles,
And last year's leaves in tumult rustles,
The downy bud-tip gently jostles,
Shaking the aromatic dust from sweet-fern tassels;

I hear thy merry flutterings,
All the bright hope thy coming brings
Unto the life of growing things;
And throb on swiftening throb of hidden partridge wings;

And find the arbutus' pink bells,
Where first the wakened insect dwells;
Rock columbine, with five deep wells,
Too deep for wanton bees to probe the treasure-cells;

Wake-robin's thrice enfolded sheaves;
Thrice purpled stole, three calix leaves;
Where azalea's flame-wand cleaves
The bower that tropic sassafras with fragrance weaves;

The swelling buds in waxy hoods;
Moccasined rills, in pensive moods,
Which thread the mossy solitudes;—
O flower, thou fable-named, in heart of haunted woods,

Brimmed with the life of restless Mays!
What floods of primal memories
Thou pourest in these peopled ways!
Thy golden goblet bears the wine of boyhood's days!

THE BUSY BEES.

I.

The plodding bees! no saintly keepers they
  Of holidays, like me and yonder linnet;
  Hard misers, they begrudge each golden
    minute.
Above my grassy seat, in scented spray
Of laden bough, they have no time for play;
  But, bustling to and fro the workshop hive,
  Enjoin all dreaming drones to wake and strive
To lay up something for a rainy day.

Ah, yes! How doth the busy bee improve
  Each shining hour with ostentatious pride!
And, ever buzzing busier, he doth love
To give us of his righteousness a sample,
  Good Doctor Watts, since you his praises wide
Have sung for lofty juvenile example.

II.

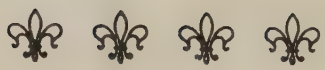
Oh, Doctor Watts! midst all this sweet array
  There cannot be at large—this heavenly weather—
  Your muse's crony of the ebon feather;
That Capitalist, who doth find alway
The unemployed a pastime light and gay—
  Some mischief still for idle hands to do!
  Such sport were fine enough, but who, O who,
Would like to take the grim employer's pay?

But, if he be on this fair morn set loose,
  He need not hope to snare me in his guile!
Yet toil ye on, blithe bees, the way ye choose
Maybe is safer; make this arbor bright,—
  A spot like Prospero's enchanted isle,—
Full of sounds and sweet airs that give delight.

UNDER THE LINDEN.

What is there more delicious than to lie
Outstretched beneath thy shade, O Linden Tree!
A long, long afternoon of mid-July,
And spin the gossamer of reverie?
For there a fountain cool of incense bends
Thy glossy boughs with a melliferous rain,
As soft as beat of wingéd thoughts that fly
To rise afar in dreamland clouds again;
For constantly the murmurs downward drift
From countless honey-seekers, plying swift.
O Linden, where was all concealed from sight?
What covert, in among your branchy ways,
This nectar hid from mortal's prying fancies?
What succulent cells through all the wintry days
Their honey stored, our eyes to now amaze—

Like fairy-work of childhood's dear romances—
This golden day of all the ripe midsummer's,
With dainty banquet spread, where swiftly hie
From all the valley-hives, the eager hummers?
The murmur of perpetual lullaby
Floats ever down, and waves of perfume seek
My clover pillow; orient butterflies,
That flit about my rest in silken guise
Of dark sultanas, softly fan my cheek.



THE PIONEER.

He said: "This barren wilderness
Shall pulse with seas of amber wheat;
These darkly shadowed vales shall bless
With life the sunshine sweet."

At misty dawn, in twilight's breeze,—
Stroke after stroke, stroke after stroke,—
The strength of leafy centuries,
Rough, giant forms, he broke;

Like some enraged iconoclast,
In righteous wrath uplifted strong,
Unroofing temples dim and vast,—
Dark shrines of ancient wrong,

That prisoned souls, which starve and grope
'Midst stony creeds in blackest night,
May catch the sky-born gleam of hope,
The manna and the light.

The crash of many a mighty oak
The forest filled with murmurings;
To frightened cries the echoes woke,
And whir of startled wings.

Broke forth no more thy pensive trill
From dimmest vale, O haunting bird!
The busy ax, remorseless still,
Its rude alarum stirred.

At last, above a cottage-fane
Blue clouds of incense wafted high;
On lowing herds and nodding grain
Looked down the broad, bright sky:

A green delight of sun and bloom,
For man a spot that yielded food;
But spread around, in primal gloom,
The woodland solitude!

The mystic groves encircled close;
Hushed glens were folded cool and dim;
And low, enticing notes arose,—
The old, mysterious hymn!

Fair shapes to depth of mossy dells
Beckoned the weary Pioneer,
And lured him on with subtile spells;
And siren voices, clear,

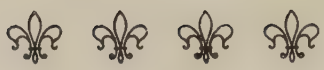
Rehearsed the old, old ravishment,—
"Forsake thy toiling and distress;
Come to the realm of rich content,
And quaff our blessedness!"

And he, who smote with ruthless hand,
Oft turned his step at twilight's hour—
Turned from the fatness of the land
To seek the forest bower.

As he, whose life is battle long
With heartless creeds, unending strife,—
Dark faiths which wreak their blighting wrong,
But give no Bread of Life,—

Oft yearns in heart, though wrath divine
Burns on his lip with bitter scorn,
Toward some crumbling temple's shrine,—
Fond Faith of ages born.

For anthems, such as angels sing,
Rise from the aisles his feet have spurned,
And prayers that once, in life's warm spring,
From mother's lip he learned.



HEARTSEASE.

Bitter blows the breath of March
Through the writhing larch;
Far and near
Lies the landscape lorn and drear.
Many a gloomy day between
Chill like this and spring, I ween!

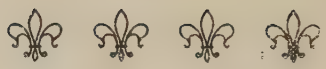
But I stoop and look into
Deepest Seventh Heaven of hue!

Ne'er beheld the rapt seer's eyes
Weft of tints like this surprise,
Vales and peaks of Paradise!
Can midsummer mate
Petal delicate
As the garment of this child
In the March wind tossing wild?
Frailest flower

Cradled in the snow-drift's bower;
Viola—
Pansy, in brave modesty
Meeting winter's bleak array
With the tender face of June,—
Snow-bank violet-strewn!

"Heartsease?" Yes;
Thou, fair saint, my heart dost bless—
Ease its cold distress.
"Love-in-idleness?"
Yes, O yes!
Glory's garment in,
Who would toil and spin?
Shakespeare, fondest lover, knew
Depth of meaning in thy hue
When he named thee true.

Henceforth will I borrow
Trouble's chains of sorrow?
Will I take thought for the morrow,
Heartsease, wresting sweet content
From the roughest element?



OCTOBER ANEMONES.

The Gentian and the Golden Rod
  Have drooped in sad disorder;
The Asters pale, the grasses nod
  Beside the woodland border.

But all those umbraged ways about,
  O'er rock-paths moss-enfolden,
The strange Witch-Hazel boughs shake out
  Fantastic blossoms golden.

And broods October's azure day,
  Through crimson archways streaming;
Silence is on the leaf-strewn way—
  A folded hush of dreaming.

For warp of leaf and woof of bloom
  Have wove their happy story
From days that April skies illume
  Through June's refulgent glory.

The glade, in flowery light that waved,
Its tender life surrenders;
And now these woodland walks are paved
With Summer's fallen splendors.

But what bedims my dazéd eyes—
What freak of Autumn sober?
Anemones?—Anemones!
A-bloom in ripe October!

Ah! Wood-elves haunt this secret dell,
With mischief overflowing!
They waved their wands, they wove their spell
To hush thy thought of blowing,

Last Spring, when bud and bulb were stirred
In wistful hope awaiting,
And in the valley every bird
Was blithe with eager mating.

And now, again, the waggish brood
With magic arts encumber—
Softly into thy bower intrude
To break thy spell-bound slumber!

Ye pets of April—changelings here
In Autumn's lap together—
Oh close is now the darkness drear
Of ruthless Winter weather!

No songs of careless birds arise,
Nor Spring-broke odors settle;
Nor come the bees and butterflies
Unto thy spotless petal.

Anemones, here shall ye lie
On breast of fonder lover;
Though cold, 'twere sweeter here to die
Than under snowy cover!

To M. A. B.

WITH AN "AUTUMN PIECE."

Accept this little Autumn Piece, dear friend—
A handful where bright flowers and berries blend,
Last token that the dying Season yields,
Dropt by some lover of the woods and fields
Upon a mossy rock, midst curious Ferns.
The fair Fringed Gentian's fragile blossom turns—
Blue as the bluest sky of tender June,
Culled from some brooklet's marshy bank, bestrewn;
Closed Gentian, too, which never opes to day,
But folds in secret bloom its soul away;
With sprigs of Golden Rod the wild winds wield—
A royal sceptre borne in every field.
The Asters vie in many a tender hue—
Violet's tinge, with purple's flush and blue.
The Indian Turnip's scarlet cluster burns
Amongst the Maiden's Hair and Tinted Ferns—

The berries of a flower of curious mould,
Jack-in-a-Pulpit quaintly named of old;
A preacher in the church of Nature's bowers
We eager sought, May morns, in childhood's hours.
Bittersweet berries, petaled like fair flowers,
Corolla, orange-hued—are lying here;
And Garget stems in lustrous dark appear.

But the gray clouds of sombre Autumn loom
Above the brightness of this Wealth of Bloom;
The winds prophetic wail of Winter near
And lies the glimmering landscape cold and drear.

Oh friend, when comes the Autumn-time of life,
And all the long days are with sadness rife;
When darkening clouds the sky of Hope bespread;
When half the golden dreams of Youth have fled;
May we from all the fields that blossomed fair
Along the path of life, in beauty rare,
Rescue some Autumn-garland's ripest boon—
A richer wreath than rims the cup of June,
Whose fadeless hue shall hint of Springs beyond
The gloom of death-like Winter's icy bond.

SAD CHRISTMASTIDE.

A chill more bitter than bleak winds is thine,
Sad Christmastide, dark end of this glad year!
Here are the gifts, warm from her loving hands,
Prepared to greet us on this opening morn;
The very flower she wooed to perfect bloom
Yet lingers; and the tender vine is coiled
With that last touch we knew not was the last!
This book lies open at the page she turned;
That picture on the wall, but now, she scanned;
And here her pen is lying idly by
A page half-written with a message fond.
All the fair things she loved expectant wait
Her coming—folded leaf and slumbering bud;
The rooftree bends above to know her wish;
And soft eyes pleadingly, with dumb brute love,
Seek the caress they know not why withheld.

So near, and yet so far! I walk in dreams:
I listen for her swift feet at the door—

Forgetting, turn to greet her glad face here,
And catch the tones of her dear voice once more.
Alas!—the silence and swift darkness fall.
This is as strange and new as if there had
Been never death in all the world before!

Sad Christmastide, thy dawn is chill and dark,
Yet day, world-bright with thrill of love divine!
May the fleet rays bring balm of holy peace—
Oh, God! thou art the lord of life and death,
Thou wilt not mock at last our groping hope!

Christmas, 1896.

A MOOD.

I.

O song-creating month of May,
  Kindling in expectation,
With strife of leaf and burst of bud,
  In throbs of aspiration!
I found companionship with you—
  Help in my restless rising;
To-day the season's royal pomp
  Is cold, unsympathizing.

II.

In this lone field beside the stream,
  I see the Autumn splendors;
On ash and elm the bittersweet
  Enkindles glowing embers;
Amidst the sombre hemlock boughs
  The twining woodbine flushes,
And, kissed by the coquettish wind,
  Yon trembling maple blushes.

III.

Soft azure floods the golden woods,
And wreaths the summits hoary;
And draweth nigh to earthly vales,
The sky's eternal glory.
Dream-anchored cloud-ships, one by one,
Their white sails furl in slumber;
And mountains watch the floating Earth,
Wrapped in adoring wonder.

IV.

The river seeks his meadow path
In trance of mazy pleasure,
Winding and dreaming past his isles,
Till lost in seas of azure.
The bubbles swim in willowy coves,
The wave in silence gushes,
And sleep the water-lily leaves
Among the flags and rushes.

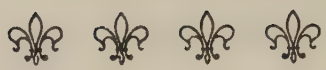
V.

O Earth, the sky in love descends,
Brooding with peace Elysian,
Your boughs are weighed with rosy fruit,
You hold the dear completion!

No anxious sigh, nor pleading look
For Heaven a boon to give you,
Nor Spring-time birth-throes, longing hope;
But peace, for Heaven is with you!

VI.

I feel the hallowed breath of joy,
Glory and exaltation;
Sweet benedictions kiss my cheek—
A touch of consecration.
Yearning, I turn from all and wait—
Unrest, sin, pain, contrition,
Tears, longing, growth-pangs, fevered strife,—
Before the blest fruition.



THE SOUL'S RETURN.

There is one spot for which my soul will yearn,
May it but come where breeze and sunlight play,
And leaves are glad; from the dark realm return;
A waif—a presence borne on kindly ray:—
Even thus, if but beneath the same blue sky!
The grazing kine not then will see me cross
The pasture slope; the swallows will not shy,
Nor brooding thrush; blithe bees the flowers will toss:
Not the faint thistle-down *my* breath may charm.
Ah, me! But I shall find the dear ways old,
If I have leave; that sheltered valley farm;
Its climbing woods, its spring, the meadow's gold;
The creek-path, dearest to my boyhood's feet:—
Oh, God! is there another world so sweet?

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